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Let's Go for Broke for Black Freedom.

by LaShawn Routé Chatmon, Executive Director, National Equity Project



Mural in Downtown Oakland, 23rd & Broadway, June 2020

“To any citizen of this country who figures himself as responsible — and particularly those of you who deal with the minds and hearts of young people — must be prepared to “go for broke.” Or to put it another way, you must understand that in the attempt to correct so many

generations of bad faith and cruelty, what is happening not only in the classroom but in society, you will meet the most fantasical, and the most determined resistance. There is no point in pretending that this won't happen.”
— James Baldwin, “A Talk to Teachers”, 1963

We have come to an unparalleled moment of definition as a country. There is no middle ground for us to seek, or cower for refuge.

With structural inequities laid bare by the coronavirus pandemic, now worsened by further evidence of racial terror being waged against Black bodies, followed by maligned indifference to demands for justice... We can no longer deny the violence, pain and loss that is being disproportionately beset upon Black people and Black communities.

As citizens of this promising yet conflicted nation, it is time for us to go for broke!



We each must make a choice: take conscious action to learn about and dismantle injustice and the winding tentacles of white supremacy in our lives, families, workplaces and communities; or stay asleep, seek comfort, look away and in doing so — perpetuate racism and the racist systems that produce the inequity and injustices we face.

This moment does *not* represent a fight for the humanity of Black people. Black people have long demonstrated our humanity in the face of unrelenting injustice and oppression.

America, we are fighting to reclaim our collective humanity!

It is time to put our collective stakes in the ground for racial justice, belonging and freedom.

We speak the names the most recent victims of state sanctioned unjust policing: George Floyd. Tony McDade. Breonna Taylor. Ahmaud Arbery. We speak their names to invoke their memory, to link their humanity to our own. We speak their names to summon the courage and conviction we need to speak, engage, connect, change, heal. To act in service of our own liberation.

As a **mother** of three beautiful, brilliant, Black young adult men, I find myself sitting with acute rage, horror and heartbreak simultaneously. Our sons have been preparing for this their whole young lives. We have raised them in community to know who they are (these were not lessons learned in school); to understand their history and systems of oppression (here schooling usually provided case in point examples of ignorance, racism and bias); they have been taught how to maintain their personal safety and that of their peers in public spaces (for as much as they can control it). In this moment they are speaking out, teaching, protesting, stepping into their role as the young rebel leaders we've raised. I am both deeply proud and at the same time overwhelmed with shame and sadness that they are inheriting this centuries old fight — the fight for their right to be seen, admired, respected and treated as men... as human.



My Suns ☀️

As a former history teacher, I know that these are not isolated incidents but rather a continuation of a long history of anti-Black oppression our communities have had to endure. Its roots are structural and interrelated; our education, healthcare, and justice systems are equally imbued with the same roots of white supremacy and othering.

As a Black woman of deep and abiding faith, I also know that in this moment, we have the opportunity, agency, and power to transform these crumbling public systems into resilient, antiracist, equitable institutions committed to our ensuring our basic human rights and collective wellbeing.

We cannot afford to wait for someone else. There is no one coming to save us, inspire us, or tell us what to do. We must be willing to build communities of resistance, love and belonging to make the progress we need and deserve.

The fight for our collective future will not be fair or gentle — power concedes nothing without demand. We are already witnessing the callous and negligent responses to demands for justice and accountability. We must not be deterred. As we press forward

with the wisdom, courage and tenacity of our ancestors, we must commit ourselves to designing a new way forward. We get to choose who we will become.

In 1963, James Baldwin told teachers: *“I don’t think anyone can doubt that in this country today we are menaced — intolerably menaced — by a lack of vision.”* While many of his words still ring true, I don’t believe this holds for us today. Instead, I see examples of a shared vision for a just and inclusive world in the streets, in my sons, and in my work with educators and leaders every day. Let’s keep working towards this vision, towards creating a world where everyone belongs.



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